

Accountability in Education: An Imperative for Service Delivery in Nigerian School Systems.

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Abstract: *Schools and other educational institutions are established, maintained and sustained essentially to achieve certain assured objectives. The goals of such establishment cannot be easily achieved without putting in place certain mechanisms towards ensuring the success of implementation of its policies and programmes. In the education system, one of the vital mechanisms to be put in place towards achieving the goals of the school and ensuring quality service delivery to the society is accountability. This paper therefore examines the concept of accountability in education, its dimensions and relevance in the school system. Some factors hindering accountability in the education system and strategies for improving accountability in the School System like regular supervision of schools, visionary leadership, effective communication, education auditing and adequate funding of the education sector to ensure efficient management and improve quality service delivery by the schools in Nigeria are adduced.*

Key words: *Accountability, Education, Service delivery, School administrators, School System.*

Introduction

Education world over is seen as the corner stone of development. It forms the basis for literacy, skills acquisition, technological advancement as well as the ability to harness the natural resources of the environment for development and this all important sector is faced with myriad of problems in Nigeria. Prominent among the problem areas that brings to light the poor show of the sector are the poor quality of school products, flawed administrative procedures and lack of accountability in the school system, politicized employment and appointment of school heads, improper supervision and defective quality assurance and control mechanism.

Every organisation either commercial or otherwise including the school are established and sustained essentially to achieve certain assured objectives. In the education system, one of the vital mechanisms to be put in place towards achieving the goals of the school and ensuring quality service delivery to the society is accountability. Accountability etiquette tends to imply that performance is related to the organizational goals. It is therefore a goal-oriental activity viewed from the input perspectives. National Open University of Nigeria, (NOUN, 2008).

In the school system, accountability is usually linked to the management of the scarce resources of education to ensure prudent utilization of available resources for the accomplishment of the stated goals of education. The integration of accountability in the education management processes helps to improve service delivery and control indiscipline in the organization thereby increasing efficiency in the system. The administrator should recognize that accountability in education is an essential ingredient that is intertwined with subordinates within the organizational framework (Nakpodia & Okeimute, 2011).

The absence of adequate teachers, facilities and other resources make the realization of educational goals difficult. The situation could never have been better since, the various governments whose responsibility is to fund education adequately has not been able to cope with the arduous task. In addition to the challenges outlined, Usman (2015) further observed that there are problems inherent in the school administrative procedures, instructional process and the product of the education system. Schools are no longer making the desired noticeable impact in achieving the set objectives of education and this constitutes a threat to the nations aspiration to be among the top 20 economies in the world by the year 2020 i.e. vision 20:2020.

Citizens are fast losing their blind faith in education as an instrument for achieving social awareness, political astuteness and economic prosperity (Eferakeya, 1988). Parents and other benefactors of education are embittered with the outcome of the schools (especially government owned) to the extent that they now seek substitute for their children's education even in the face of free education programmes in some states. In the past few years, calls for accountability in the administration and management of schools in Nigeria have become imperative because of the demand for constructive changes in our education system and the high need for school products that will meet the needs of the society.

In the schools, administrators have been observed to neglect the essential task of grooming the future leaders for the hunt of other mundane activities for financial benefits rather than on their administrative functions. The effect of the neglect is manifested in the present day wastages of education resources in the system. An evaluation using the quality assurance instrument for Basic and Secondary Education in Nigeria conducted in 102 secondary schools selected across the federation revealed that only 6 schools were rated good, 28 schools fair, 65 schools poor and 3 were rated very poor while the rating evaluation of leadership and management in the schools indicated that none of the schools was outstanding while 13 were rated good, 51 adjudged fair and 37 very poor. (Ugochi, 2011). The evaluation results portends a serious danger to the education sector and

the nation's hope of achieving an improved economic growth, national development and hope of being among the top twenty economies in the world by the year 2020.

Accountability in education has become very imperative considering the fact that the society expects very much from the school system. All operators in the school system have an obligation to live up to their responsibilities by making the education system very responsive, competitive and productive. Educational administrators are both accountable to the entire stakeholders in education as well as accountable for achieving the goal of education using available resources. Accountability in education desires an administrator that is proficient to mobilize the necessary actors and factors in the system to achieve the desired goals of education and render account of such stewardship thus enhancing seamless adjustment into the change agenda of present administration in Nigeria.

The Concept of Education Accountability

The concept of Education Accountability is conceptualized in diverse perspectives. Ethically, Hunt (2002), views accountability as the readiness or preparedness to give an explanation or justification to relevant stakeholders for one's judgments, intentions, acts and omissions when appropriately called upon to do so. It is readiness to have one's actions judged by others and where appropriate, accept responsibility for errors, misjudgements and negligence and recognition for competence, thoroughness, excellence and wisdom.

In the political scene, the term suggests that any governmental entity functions as a part and not independent of a larger political system. The ensuring interaction subjects the entity to some controls, which cause it to render a general accounting of and for its actions. Presthus (1975) notes that accountability is geared towards ensuring democratic responsibility to the public at large. Accordingly, he maintains that every public official is subject to two types of accountability namely: fiduciary accountability and accountability for the exercise of proper judgment in making fiscal decisions while according to Knezevich (1975) the scope implies "financial accountability, budgeting, fiscal audits and reporting to satisfy the existing demands of the public".

According to NOUN (2008) Accountability in education is the answerability to one's actions in the educational system. It is the state of being accountable to the stakeholders in education and accountable for the resources used in education. This implies that accountability is a measure of the extent to which all available resources in a productive system are used for greater efficiency and productivity. Accountability in education is concerned with determining what records are to be kept, how such records will be maintained in terms of procedures, methodology and forms to be used, in recording classification and summarization of activities of events analyzing and interpreting the

recorded data, preparing and issuing reports and statements which reflect conditions as of a given time (Adams, Hill, Lichtenberger, Perkins and Shaw, 1967).

Accountability in education is concerned with keeping records of school activities and using such record to assess or appraise institutional performance in relation to the achievement of predetermined objectives. This is buttressed by Okoroma (2007) who argued that accountability in education has elicited much attention as a result of the following reasons: (i) The school system, which facilitates the objectives of education, is a creation of the society which must maintain checks and balances. (ii) Education is generally funded by society through taxes, which must necessarily exercise some control in all facets of the educational process (Okoroma, 2007).

The tasks of accounting, auditing and reporting are associated with the business of formal education. The concept of educational accountability is used to describe (a) the nature, sources and amount of revenue inputs, (b) the appropriation of revenues to various programmes and (c) the actual expenditures in these programmes. These data are then related to educational outputs or benefits so that the actions are able to understand the financial implications of educational decisions. Consequent upon the above, educational managers are accountable to the public. In order to aid the process of accountability in education, administrators of the educational system should among others: (i) Identify the goals and objectives of the educational system; (ii) determine the validity and relevance of such goals and objectives; (iii) assess periodically how fully such goals and objectives have been achieved; (iv) identify which factors assisted or hampered goal achievement in the system; and (v) design strategies to improve performance.

NOUN (2008) identified the following classification of accountability in education (i) Product/output Accountability: This has to do with the evaluation of teaching effectiveness and the extent to which the teacher achieves the expected outcome of teaching and classroom interaction. (ii) Input Accountability: This concerns the evaluation of the extent of adequacy of supervision, monitoring and evaluation of the system's operations. (iii) Process accountability: This has to do with maintaining the pedagogic method required in the instructional process, school administrative procedures and classroom interaction to bring about simplified and effective teaching – learning situation. (iv) Goal Accountability: This relates to the evaluation of the selection, definition and the prioritization of the goals and objectives of education. (v) Accountability for Means and Enabling Environment: This refers to the evaluation of the extent to which the general public shows their co-operation in providing the required resources for education as well as creating the right atmosphere for educational pursuit in the state.

Furthermore, Okoroma (2007:58) identified four areas of educational accountability as: (i) Accountability for Cash:-The educational manager is required to account for every cash received for the development of education in his school. This requirement is a factor that enables him to exercise utmost carefulness in the disbursement of public funds. (ii) Accountability for Things: Physical facilities of the school must be accounted for. The use of such facilities as school buildings, Vehicles, libraries, laboratories, personnel etc should be adequately accounted for. (iii) Accountability for Actions: All actions of every member of an organization must be accounted for by the educational manager including his own actions. (iv) Accountability for Results: Every organization has goals and objectives it has set for accomplishment. The educational administrator has a duty to ensure that expected results are achieved. In fact, the quality of result obtained from any educational efforts will show whether expected goals are attained or not.

Educational accountability ensures a rational critical and a systematic analysis of activities of the education production process with the aim of verifying that educational goals have been efficiently or wastefully achieved. Accountability in the school system helps in the protection of public property from abuse through under or over utilization. It enhances checks and balance in the educational system such that conformities can be appreciated and improved upon while non conformities can be identified, sanctioned and corrected appropriately and timely. It has been noted that accountability in the school system helps to protect public funds from misuse as well as fostering a committed pursuit of educational goals by administrators (Tawari, 1995).

Educational accountability enhances teaching and learning in the school system. It forestalls the misuse of public funds and facilities. Accountability in the school system also enhances the realization of institutional objectives. Accountability skills help to strengthen the school system with the ability to provide a meaningful account or report to acknowledge that educational objectives identified and intended to be achieved with a given resources have been achieved. It encourages keeping proper records or account of all incomes received and all expenditures made to the satisfaction of the public that support education.

Dimensions of Accountability in Education

According to NOUN (2008) there are the two dimensions of accountability in the education sector. (i) Accountability for Achieving Institutional Objectives: An educational system exists to achieve the diverse objectives of education. The school administrator is usually accountable for the quality and clarity of the school's objectives and priorities. The school administrator is accountable for the quality of the teaching learning process in the school and also expected to ensure that proper assessment procedures take place in the school.(ii) Accountable to Superior Officers: Regardless of

whether the educational administrator is a headmaster, principal, provost, rector or vice-chancellor, he is an employee of the Ministry of education and State school Board officials representing his employers. Employees are accountable to the employers in the following areas; the pupils, the staff, the community, the facilities and the finances, which have been entrusted into their care.

Furthermore, the school administrators, apart from being accountable to his employers, is also accountable to the parents who have entrusted their children into their care to be trained/educated; staff who depend on the leadership qualities of the administrator to enable them make a success of their own jobs; the learners who depend on the school administrator to create the right atmosphere their cognitive, affective and psychomotive development and the society who depends on the school system to produce well trained individuals that are valuable assets in their communities.

Educational activities affect almost every individual in the society in one way or the other. In accounting for the progress of educational system each individual is responsible to someone and for specific activities that facilitate goal achievement. Accountability starts with the classroom teacher. He is accountable for the expected outcome of his job as a teacher. The teacher is directly accountable to the school administrator who may be Headmaster, Principal, Provost, Rector or Vice-chancellor. School administrators are accountable directly to the various statutory organs set up by government to co-ordinate their affairs. Amongst such organs is the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and the National Universities Commission (NUC) etc.

Statutory Bodies like the NBTE, NCCE and NUC are accountable to the Minister of Education for selection and employment of staff to the institutions and for instructional programmes to facilitate goal achievement. The Minister, Commissioner and Ministry of Education are accountable to the Governor/Presidency for the supervision, monitoring and evaluation of the process of education. The President/Governor is accountable to the National Assembly for the selection, definition and prioritization of the goals and objectives of education and the National Assembly/State Assembly is accountable to the electorates who provide the funds and enabling environment for the pursuit of education (Durosaro, 2002).

Factors hindering Accountability in the Education system.

Accountability in education is faced with a number of problems including vague definition of educational goals, which makes implementation and goal attainment difficult. Inability of the school system to keep up with the innovations dictated by the needs of the changing society. The sub-groups in every society with their varied needs, values, interests, desires, aspirations and cultures

which often tend to conflict with one another thereby make the enforcement of accountability in the school system ineffective. School administrators are unable to command absolute leadership responsiveness from their administrative subordinates and this constitutes a hindrance to the practice of accountability. (Kaufman, 1973)

Education policies have been observed to change with changes in the political leadership of Nigeria. The inconsistencies in educational policies have been argued to be responsible for lack of accountability and poor service delivery in the system. School supervisors, school heads and the teachers do not receive corresponding incentive to enable them to be totally committed to their jobs. It is difficult for personnel with such mindset to accept a tedious task and render account. Shortage of Funds could account for the poor performance of administrators of academic institutions. At all levels of institution in Nigeria funds have always been inadequate and consequently there has been gap between the expected level and the actual attainment. (Ekundayo, 2010). Politicization of appointments in the education sector where non professional are appointed as heads of education institutions either due to party, ethnic, regional or religious affiliation constitutes an obstacle to accountability in the education system of Nigeria.

Strategies for Improving Accountability in the School System

To improve accountability for better goal achievement the following strategies will play a vital role, Regular Supervision is a technique that assists educational administrators to foster the professional growth of workers in the educational system. Supervision enhances the development of appropriate educational goals and facilitates the selection of appropriate teaching procedures and facilities (Theirauf, 1977). Staff Motivation is the energizing force behind all other activities of educational managers. Managers should know how to keep good morals of their workers in order to obtain maximum efficiency and effectiveness from them

Effective communication also helps educational administrators to fulfil their executive functions of planning, organizing, motivating, resolving conflicts and controlling activities which are linked to accountability. This can enhance job satisfaction and create in employees a high sense of belongingness and loyalty to the organization. There is no doubt; effective communication can be an effective parameter for future accountability. Evaluation is a formal process carried out within a school setting to improve on the present level of performance. It is the last phase of management function and helps to monitor the effectiveness of a school system. Proper evaluation of instructional process, school administrative procedure and educational outcomes aids in improving accountability in the education system through quality control system.

Operators in the education sector should be availed the opportunity to attend career development and capacity building workshops, seminars and in-service trainings to put them up to date with current events in the education sector, improve their productivity and build in them the required leadership skills to assume responsibility. Government and stakeholders at all levels should make adequate fund available to education sector in order to procure the necessary materials that will aid effective school administration and supervision. Implementing the UNICEF resolution that certain percentage of a nation's budget should be voted for the education sector will afford the agencies and parastatals in education to carry out their activities effectively. Educational auditing enhances a better understanding of the school as a social system and this improves its decision-making processes. In order to have greater accountability and better management in the schools, school administrators are advised to adopt the auditing technique as it helps to determine the internal efficiency of the school system (Omoregie, 1981).

Conclusion.

Educational administrators are accountable to the stakeholders in education as well as accountable for achieving the goals of education using available resources and employing globally acceptable best practices in school administration. In view of the foregoing, it is hoped that if the above strategies are considered and implemented meticulously, it could improve quality service delivery in the school system through enhanced instructional process, efficient administrative procedures, purposeful leadership that will guarantee quality output from the school system and ensure effective accountability by the school systems to the society.

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